



PTTC

Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

## HARM REDUCTION THROUGH A PREVENTION LENS



Harm Reduction and Prevention have common goals in reducing the adverse health and social consequences of substance use but exist at different places in the continuum of Universal, Selective, and Indicated Prevention.

**Harm reduction** is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs. Harm reduction does not require abstinence from any risky behaviors.

*The principles of harm reduction were developed nearly 25 years ago by and for people who use drugs. At their core, the principles are people centered, pragmatic, and take into consideration important sociocultural factors—such as race, poverty, and social disapproval of drugs and drug users.*

DEFINITION FROM THE HARM REDUCTION COALITION



### HARM REDUCTION AND PREVENTION HAVE COMMON GOALS

- Provide interventions for a continuum of substance users for a variety substances.
- Focus on individual and community risks associated with substance use.
- Honor and incorporate cultural in interventions.
- Promote individual and community wellbeing.

### TO REDUCE HARM WHEN USING SUBSTANCES, INDIVIDUALS SHOULD ALWAYS

- Have a safety plan with a trusted individual.
- Use clean needles and do not share if injecting.
- Assess the safety of the surroundings before using.
- Know personal limits and decide how much to use in advance.
- Test the strength and purity of each use by starting with a small dose.

## SUBSTANCE

## HARM REDUCTION STRATEGIES FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

### Alcohol<sup>1</sup>

- Coordinate transportation in advance.
- Alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.
- Stay hydrated and eat before drinking.
- Reduce the number of days you drink per week or month.

### Cocaine<sup>2</sup>

- Do not use multiple times in one session.
- Plan a day of rest, rather than more substance, to cope with the crash
- Use small amounts and gauge response. Not all cocaine is the same strength and purity.
- Avoid damage to nasal tissue by alternating nostrils, inserting snorting equipment further in the nose, and using a fine powder.

### Hallucinogens<sup>3</sup>

- Be aware of your mindset and avoid use if feeling depressed
- Use in a comfortable and with trusted people to reduce the chances of a bad trip.
- Do not use with other substances, particularly stimulants.

### Inhalants<sup>4</sup>

- Take breaks between use so your body can have enough oxygen.
- Use a paper bag not plastic to reduce risk of suffocation.
- Do not smoke as most inhalants are highly flammable.

### Marijuana<sup>5</sup>

- Reduce respiratory complications. Do not smoke with tobacco, take shallow puffs, and use a vaporizer.
- Eat edibles slowly and start with low doses.
- Store edibles out of reach of children and pets.
- Don't drive while high. Impairment after smoking can last up to 6 hours and longer with edibles.

### MDMA (Ecstasy/Molly)<sup>6</sup>

- Drink plenty of water in small, frequent amounts.
- Avoid overheating and exertion.
- Have a friend to talk to if you feel experience negative emotions.

### Methamphetamine<sup>7</sup>

- Drink plenty of water, get adequate sleep, and eat proper foods.
- "Start low, go slow" to avoid overamping.
- Snort or smoke over injecting

### Opioids (Heroin, fentanyl, etc.)<sup>8</sup>

- Use clean needs, syringe exchanges and/or safe injection sites.
- Use fentanyl test strips.
- Carry naloxone
- Snort or smoke over injecting.

### Synthetic Cathinones (Bath Salts)

- Use a testing kit prior to use<sup>9</sup>
- Use clean needles, syringe exchanges, and do not share needles<sup>10</sup>

### Tobacco, Nicotine & Vaping<sup>11</sup>

- Cut down the number of cigarettes smoked.
- Decrease the number of puffs per cigarette, puff duration, and puff volume.
- Do not change or add anything to a vaping device or supplies.
- Do not use THC in vaping device.
- Use vaping products only from reputable sources.

## VIRAL INFECTIONS THAT COMMONLY OCCUR WITH SUBSTANCE USE

### HIV and Hepatitis (HEP B/HEP C)<sup>12</sup>

- Use clean needles, syringe exchanges, and do not share needles
- Use condoms, dental dams, lubricants, and other safe sex items.
- Get tested regularly.
- Get vaccinated against Hepatitis B

<sup>1</sup> <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/harm-reduction>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.verywellmind.com/harm-reduction-tips-for-cocaine-users-21993>

<sup>3</sup> <https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/psychedelics/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://harmreductionto.ca/inhalants>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cna-aic.ca/~media/cna/page-content/pdf-en/harm-reduction-for-non-medical-cannabis-use>

<sup>6</sup> <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/harm-reduction>

<sup>7</sup> <https://drugpolicy.org/drug-facts/harm-reduction-meth>

<sup>8</sup> <https://harmreduction.org/issues/overdose-prevention/overview/overdose-basics/opioid-od-risks-prevention/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://drugpolicy.org/how-can-we-reduce-harms-associated-synthetic-cathinones>

<sup>10</sup> <https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/synthetic-cathinones/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/4/Suppl\\_2/S33](https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/4/Suppl_2/S33)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/drug-use-viral-infections-hiv-hepatitis>